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ABSTRACT

A study investigated correlations between students' and parents' attitudes toward the Hebrew language, students' attitudes and achievement in Hebrew, attitude differences in boys and girls, and attitude differences of students in the third and fourth years of Hebrew study. Parents and students in four Chicago-area supplementary Hebrew schools were administered attitude questionnaires, and student achievement was measured with standardized, norm-referenced tests. The findings were contrary to expectations. The correlation between parents' and students' attitudes was low and not significant. The correlation between student attitudes and achievement was low, although statistically significant. There was no difference between boys' and girls' mean attitude scores, and no difference between the two instructional levels. (MSE)

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The Correlation of Parents' and Students' Attitudes With Hebrew Language Achievement

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Abstract

The study investigated correlations between parents' and students' attitudes toward the Hebrew language; and the correlation between students' attitudes toward, and achievement in, the Hebrew language. Additionally, differences in attitudes between boys and girls and between students in Levels 3 and 4 were investigated. The sample consisted of 217 students in the third and fourth years of Hebrew instruction, and their parents, from four supplementary Hebrew schools in the Chicago area. Students and parents were administered attitude questionnaires designed to measure their attitudes toward the Hebrew language. Students' Hebrew achievement was measured using standardized, norm-referenced tests. Findings were contrary to expectations: Correlation between parents' and students' attitudes was low and not significant. Correlation between students' attitude and achievement, although statistically significant ($p < .01$) was low ($r = .20$). There was no difference between boys' and girls' mean attitude scores, and no difference between students in the third and fourth years of instruction. The discussion attempts to explain the findings, and suggestions for further research are presented.

The Correlation of Parents' and Students' Attitudes With Hebrew Language Achievement

The role of attitudes in the acquisition of second language has been explored by many researchers in the last 30 years. Studies investigated the relationships between students' and parents' attitudes, and between students' and teachers' attitudes and achievement (Anisfeld & Lambert, 1961; Dockrell & Brosseau, 1967; Feenstra, 1969; Gardner, 1968, 1985; Macnamara, 1973). In addition, several studies explored the effect of teachers' attitudes on students' attitudes and achievement (Feenstra, 1969; Gardner, 1968).

In their discussion of attitudes toward a second language, Gardner and Lambert (1959) distinguished between integrative and instrumental orientations. Integrative orientation is where the learner studies the second language in order to learn more about the language group; and instrumental orientation is where learning the second language has more practical applications.

A widely-held opinion is that the home environment and parents' attitudes toward a second language correlate positively with their children's attitudes (Gardner, 1985). Feenstra (1969) sees the students' orientation as based upon the family-wide orientation.

Parents may play passive or active roles in shaping their child's attitude toward, and acquisition of, a second language and in the child's attitude toward the other ethnic groups (Gardner, 1985). In the active role, "the parent monitors the child's language learning performance, and, ... attempts to promote success" (Feenstra, 1969, p. 9). The passive role, which involves the parents' attitudes toward the second language community, is more subtle and the parent may

not be aware of its impact (Gardner, 1985, p. 110).

Research has shown that there is a correlation between the child's attitude toward, and avhievement in, second language. Gardner (1968) summarized several studies done in Canada and the U.S., and concluded that, in all these studies, "The results clearly indicate a particular pattern of attitudinal-motivational components facilitated second language acquisition" (p. 143).

Less conclusive were the results from several studies (Anisfeld & Lambert, 1961; Dockerell & Brosseau, 1967) which did not find a clear pattern of correlation between students' attitudes and various measures of second language achievement. Macnamara (1973) is opposed to the commonly-held belief that an integrative attitude is more likely to lead to success than an instrumental attitude. He emphasizes the practical aspects of learning a language, and suggests that language is for communicating and, therefore, we should stop talking about attitude and start talking about communication.

Another variable studied in connection with second language acquisition is the sex of the learner. Bartley (1969) investigated the differences between students who dropped out of second language courses after junior high school and those who continued their studies in high school,and found that the two groups differed in attitude and that the girls in both groups had more favorable attitudes toward the second language than did the boys.

A survey of research on relationships between attitudes and second language achievement revealed that only one study dealt with the attitudes of the students toward the Hebrew language (Anisfeld & Lambert, 1961). This study was conducted 25 years ago in Jewish schools in Montreal. The sample consisted of 81 eighth and ninth grade students in seven all-day schools and supplementary

Hebrew schools. Three types of measures were obtained for each student: achievement, ability, and attitudes. Teacher ratings and voice recordings of reading were used to measure achievement. Verbal Reasoning Test, IQ and Psi-Lambda Foreign Language Aptitude Battery were used to measure aptitude. Attitudes were measured using Anti-Semitism scale and Orientation Index. The researchers concluded that intelligence and linguistic aptitudes are relatively stable predictors of language achievement. The relationships between attitudes and achievement were not consistent across the different schools. One possible explanation was that one of the measures of achievement--teacher rating--was not a reliable measure, especially in the schools where teachers did not have a chance to get to know the students well. The researchers suggested that in those schools teachers' rating was affected by other variables (e.g. students' attitudes) in addition to strict achievement.

In the only other study about the attitudes of students toward the Hebrew school, Press (1984) interviewed in-depth 18 students and concluded that the students, "although not always enthusiastic about the process, acknowledge that the Hebrew school served a legitimate and positive role in their life" (p. 20).

The attitudes of parents toward Jewish schools in general and toward the Hebrew language in particular were not studied in communities outside Israel. Since many children attend Hebrew school because their parents want them to, parents' attitudes as well as childrens' attitudes become an important factor. Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate relationships between parents' and students' attitudes toward the Hebrew language and students' achievements in Hebrew. In addition, the study attempted to explore sex and grade level differences in the students' attitudes toward Hebrew.

Through personal experience, Jewish educators have noted the fact that a positive attitude toward Jewish studies is positively correlated with achievement. While attitudes affect achievement in any subject matter and in every population and setting, the relationships are expected to be even stronger in Jewish education.

The subject area selected for the study was Hebrew language which is the most important subject in the Hebrew school, and for which standardized, norm-referenced achievement tests are available.

The students begin to study in the supplementary Hebrew schools usually when they are in the third grade of public school, and continue until the end of the seventh grade when they become Bar/Bat Mitzvah. In the first two years, the children are usually interested in this new and novel experience. In the third year, however, attitudes start to change and students become more reluctant to give up their free time in order to attend Hebrew school. Thus, the target population was that of students in their third and fourth years of instruction. (The fifth year students could not be studied because, at the present time, there is no reliable measure of Hebrew achievement for that level.)

The study was designed to test the following hypotheses:

1. There will be a positive, significant correlation between parents' and students' attitudes toward the Hebrew language.

2. There will be a positive, significant correlation between students' attitudes and achievement.

3. Students in the fourth year of instruction will have a significant lower mean score on the attitude questionnaire than will students in the third year of instruction.

4. Girls in the third and fourth year of instruction will have a significant higher mean score on the attitude questionnaire than will boys.

Method

Sample

Four Hebrew schools (three Conservative and one Reform) from the Chicago suburban areas which are affiliated with the Board of Jewish Education of Metropolitan Chicago (BJE) participated in the study. The congregations of these communities come from middle to upper-middle class socioeconomic backgrounds. These communities are a good representative sample of the larger Jewish population in the Chicago area in terms of Jewish background, involvement in educational and social activities, and socioeconomic status.

The sample was comprised of 217 students ranging in age from 9 to 12 years, who were in their third and fourth years of Hebrew instruction in supplementary Hebrew schools (i.e. their Jewish education is in addition to regular public schools). There were 111 boys and 106 girls.

The parents of all the participating students were asked to complete the parents' questionnaire, and 108 parents responded; however, there was no attempt to increase the response rate because the returned questionnaires represented well the overall population.

Instruments

Attitude questionnaire. Parents' and students' attitudes were measured using attitude questionnaires. The two forms, one for parents and one for students, were constructed and pilot tested in the fall of 1985. Sixty-three parents and 113 students, ages 9-12 (third and fourth year of instruction) in five supplementary Hebrew schools (three Conservative and two Reform) participated in the pilot test. Parents and students were asked to write their

names because in the actual study they would also have to indicate their names. The items were constructed carefully and reviewed by Jewish educators to ensure a high face validity. Each questionnaire consists of 14 Likert-scale items with responses of strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. In order to determine the questionnaires' reliability, the SPSS reliability program (Cronbach's alpha) was used. The reliability of the students' questionnaire was r=.83, and the parents' questionnaire reliability was r=.89.

The two questionnaires were further submitted to factor analysis to determine if there are any underlying factors similar to those identified in other studies dealing with attitude toward second lanuage. Previous studies (e.g. Gardner & Lambert, 1959) identified two orientations toward language: integrative and instrumental. The parents' attitude questionnaire revealed a similar pattern. There were three factors, two of which were labeled independently by two Jewish educators as "Hebrew as part of Jewish knowledge and identity", indicating the integrative orientation; and "Hebrew as a tool of communication", indicating an instrumental orientation. A third factor, unique to supplementary Jewish education, was labeled as "Hebrew studies as detraction from public school".

The students' questionnaire did not yield a clear factor solution. It had a four-factor solution, in which the fourth factor had only one item. It is possible that young children do not have a clear pattern of attitudes, and that one must mature in order to formulate attitudes and opinions.

Hebrew language achievement tests. The participating schools administer norm-referenced, standardized Hebrew language achievement tests at the end of each school year. These paper-and-pencil tests (Ravid, 1980) have been used in the Chicago metropolitan area since 1980, and are also administered nationally

by Jewish Education Service of North America. They have a reliability ranging from r=.89 to r=.92. Each test has 50 items which measure skills in listening comprehension, reading comprehension, language structure, and vocabulary.

Design

The study was descriptive, using two attitude questionnaires and achievement test scores to generate the data base. The following information was available: Students' age and grade level, sex, Hebrew language achievement score, and students' and parents' attitude scores. The achievement scores were retrieved from Spring 1985 testing. It was possible to correlate the data since parents and students were asked to include their names.

In addition, a t-test was applied to determine if there were differences in attitude scores between boys and girls and between the third year (Level 3) and the fourth year (Level 4) students.

Procedure

In January 1986, the students' and parents' questionnaires were distributed to the four schools. The students completed the questionnaires in class, while the parents' questionnaires were mailed to the parents of the participating students, accompanied by a letter from the schools' educational director which explained briefly the purpose of the study. A self-addressed envelope addressed to this researcher at the BJE was included with the parents' questionnaire. Parents had the option of mailing their questionnaires directly to the BJE or returning them to their child's school. The returned questionnaires were scored, and the information was coded to facilitate computer analysis.

Results

Pearson Product Moment intercorrelations were computed for the variables of Hebrew language achievement (ACH); Student attitude (SAT); and Parent attitude (PAT). The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Pearson Intercorrelation between Achievement (ACH) Students' Attitudes (SAT) and Parents' Attitudes (PAT)

	SAT	PAT
ACH	r=.20*	r=.29*
	n= 195	n= 86
SAT		r=.06
		n= 108

* $p < .01$

The results of the t-test comparing mean scores on the attitude questionnaire between boys and girls and between Level 3 and Level 4 are presented in Table 2. The t values in both cases were non-significant.

Table 2

T-Test Results: Comparison of Students' Attitudes (SAT) Between Levels 3 and 4 and Between Boys and Girls

		SAT		
	n	$\bar{x}$	SD	t
Level				
3	122	41.32	5.52	.06
4	95	41.37	6.26	
Sex				
Boys	111	41.21	6.24	.30
Girls	106	41.45	5.43	

Discussion

The obtained results were unexpected and failed to confirm three out of the four proposed hypotheses. The correlation between parents' and students' attitudes toward the Hebrew language, although positive, was very low and non-significant, leading to rejection of the first hypothesis. The second hypothesis was supported, with the correlation between students' attitude and achievement reaching significant level of $p < .01$; however, the actual correlation coefficient was only $r = .20$ (Table 1) indicating a small shared variance. The third and fourth hypotheses were also not confirmed. The t-test results, comparing means on the students' attitude questionnaire were not significant, with almost identical means of Level 3 and Level 4, and of Boys and Girls (Table 2).

In trying to understand these findings, two major explanations are possible: (a) the hypotheses are wrong, and (b) there were flaws in the study. The first three hypotheses were based on previous studies, and the fourth hypothesis was based on observation and opinion of Jewish educators, hence they seem to be sound. As to flaws in the study, the sample was representative and not too small, and the instruments had an adequate level of reliability and validity. Based on these arguments, a simple explanation of the findings was not available.

In discussing the findings with professional, experienced Jewish educator colleagues, the following were suggested:

1. Every average and above-average student in the Hebrew school can have high levels of achievement, regardless of attitude, because good students tend to perform well in all subject areas, especially when the pace is not so fast and demanding--as is the case in Hebrew schools.

2. Linguistic aptitude determines achievement in language achievement more than does attitude.

3. Achievement in the Hebrew language is mostly skills-related and not attitude-related.

The finding that students' attitudes toward the Hebrew language do not correlate with parents' attitudes (r=.06) is quite puzzling. The commonly-held belief among Jewish educators is that parents' attitudes affect their children's attitudes. It is possible that parents do not communicate their feelings and opinions to their children, causing the two sets of attitudes (parents' and children's) to be independent of each other. It is also possible that children's attitudes at the elementary school level are not stable yet, and trying to

correlate their attitudes with any other measure will yield low correlations. A test-retest procedure using the students' attitude questionnaire may provide some information about the stability of the students' attitudes.

Clearly, the question of correlation between parents' and students' attitudes toward the Hebrew language must be studied further. The study should be duplicated with elementary school students and their parents. It should also be extended to include older students on junior and high school levels.

The relationships between students' attitudes toward, and achievement in, the Hebrew language, and the sex and level differences should also be explored in future studies. These studies should include different populations such as students in Jewish day schools and older students in Hebrew schools.

Another variable which should be investigated is the importance of the integrative and instrumental orientations in the parents' and students' attitude toward the Hebrew language. It is conceivable that each of the two orientations has a different relationship with students' attitudes and achievement.

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